Managing Product Returns in Swiss Online Apparel Retailing: A Multiple Case Study Approach

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Abstract

Product returns are a critical, costly task for online retailers; yet the process of avoiding returns is neither actively managed nor investigated. Based on a multiple case study approach, the authors collected six in-depth interviews with top- and middle-level apparel industry managers to shed light on the management and avoidance of product returns in online apparel retailing. Our findings identified several applications to reduce the environmental footprint of product returns and improving the company's performance, based on five facets of returns management: (1) the interplay of return policy, product category, and preventive actions; (2) the application of avoidance practices; (3) the management of returns in omnichannel retail; (4) the potential of AI to reduce return rates; and (5) the role of sustainability in consumer behaviour. To reduce product returns and enhance a company's performance, we propose to map the practices against different phases of the return journey.

Keywords: *product returns; multiple case study approach; online apparel retailing*

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